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# Towards a typology of ceasefires: order amid violence

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## ABSTRACT

Traditionally, ceasefires have primarily been seen as military tools used to halt violence for specific periods of time or as a teleological bridge between war and peace. Drawing from the literature on complex political order, this paper argues that rather than only affecting levels of violence ceasefires can be better conceptualised as particular types of wartime order and that consequently they can have diverse military and political consequences on the ground. These may include for recognition and legitimation, rebel governance, economic networks, state consolidation and rights to citizenship and property. The article uses this broader conceptual foundation and an analysis of 186 ceasefire agreements to create a typology with four different types of ceasefires and theorise about their potential ramifications for other contested areas beyond the military arena. It illustrates the different types of ceasefires from the typology with empirical examples from the Syrian civil war.

## KEYWORDS

Ceasefires; typology; conflict resolution; civil war; Syria

## Introduction

Since their inception, ceasefires have generally been thought of as a bridge between war and ‘peace’.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, their success has tended to be measured by their ability to pause or decrease armed hostilities for limited periods of time (see, e.g. Fortna 2004). Even the pre-eminent jurist on the laws of armed conflict Hugo Grotius (2005 ed., 434) assumed ceasefires to be a temporary state of affairs, pointing out that during a ceasefire there was no need to change the legal classification of war since the conflict was ‘not dead, but sleeping’. However, Grotius’ metaphor perhaps does not imply that nothing happens while the conflict is supposedly sleeping. Even during sleep, much can happen while our minds are elsewhere.

So far ceasefire definitions have overwhelmingly focused on their ability to reduce violence. This article takes a broader view by arguing that ceasefire agreements establish particular types of ‘wartime order’ and that current definitions fail to adequately capture this variation. Through a typology, based on two variables—the text of ceasefire agreements and the power relationship between signatories—we can discern four distinct categories of ceasefire. Each type has unique implications not just for military dynamics, but also for political strategies and future negotiations. While military machinations are undeniably an important aspect of civil wars, ceasefires can also be implicated in how other disputed

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political dynamics play out. These include for recognition and legitimization of non-state actors (Kolås 2011), efforts at rebel governance (Mampilly 2011, 81, 223; Harrison and Kyed 2019), consolidation and control over economic resources and networks (Martínez and Eng 2016; Woods 2011) and rights to citizenship and property (Sosnowski 2019).

To create the typology, this paper starts with an analysis of 186 ceasefire agreements<sup>2</sup> in civil wars since the end of the Cold War. Through an abductive process, I group the dataset of ceasefires along two dimensions (Rueschemeyer 2003). The first variable relates directly to the text of the agreements and whether the terms are detailed or vague. This is because primary documents such as ceasefire agreements contain detailed information that potentially tells us a lot about the aims, objectives and motivations of the parties involved (Yin 2009, 103). The second variable relates to the power disparity between the parties at the time the ceasefire was signed i.e. whether it is symmetrical or asymmetrical, because this element also has ramifications for what contested areas belligerents may be willing to negotiate and/or accept (Werner and Yuen 2005). The coding exercise leads to a typology of ceasefires that contains four types. I call these four types *substantive*, *interim*, *symbolic* and *coercive*.

To bolster the findings of the typology, the paper draws on scholarship in the field of complex political order. It uses this research to make the case that wartime order is in a constant state of negotiation and that actors use ceasefires as a way to consolidate their military *and* political advantage. Because ceasefires have rarely been studied in this broader way, granular, empirical evidence from civil war environments is also necessary to test and tweak the typology further. To accomplish this task in these early stages of developing the typology, I draw on my previous research about how ceasefires function in the Syrian civil war. The examples show that different types of ceasefires were used throughout the Syrian civil war and that the different types of ceasefires had differing purposes for the signatories—but also for more local actors. While the ceasefires may have influenced military dynamics, they also played a role in the development of governance institutions; the assertion of property and citizenship rights; the development of economic networks and consolidation over security, diplomacy and territorial control.

The article advances in five subsequent parts. Directly below I offer an examination of how ceasefires have traditionally been defined and go on to advocate for a broader conceptualisation about their diversity and consequences beyond purely as a way of affecting violence by drawing from the newer scholarship on complex political order. In the second section, I outline the methodology used to construct the typology and discuss some of its limitations. In the third section, I present the four types of ceasefires in more detail. The fourth section applies the typology to the main ceasefires that occurred during the Syrian civil war to illustrate that different types of ceasefires can occur throughout the chronology of a conflict, highlight some of their political ramifications and why they were used by the conflict parties at those particular times. In the conclusion I suggest how the typology can be used as a predictor for the political dynamics ceasefires can spawn. Consequently, it can be a useful tool for policy-makers and practitioners to help them negotiate and manage the ramifications of ceasefires.

## Ceasefires and complex political order

Dating back to as early as the Middle Ages there has been little agreement, and much confusion, around what exactly a ceasefire is and what it should be called. Historically, the

words truce and armistice were used interchangeably (Morris 1995, 801) but in more recent times other terms such as cessation of hostilities,<sup>3</sup> humanitarian pause (Slemrod 2017) and de-escalation<sup>4</sup> have been added to the lexicon. Despite the burgeoning vocabulary, so far all of the above have been seen predominantly in relation to how they affect violence being variously defined by their ability to terminate violence (UCDP); 'define the rules and modalities for conflict parties to stop fighting' (Chounet-Cambas 2016, 1); or as 'an end to or break in the fighting, whether or not it represents the final end of the war' (Fortna 2004, 45). Consequently, the overwhelming focus on ceasefires, in practice and in scholarship and regardless of what they are called, remains on them as a way to stop or reduce the use of violence for periods of time or as a preliminary step that builds trust between belligerents and in the process offers space to negotiate a comprehensive ceasefire and/or a peace agreement.

This common understanding of ceasefires is well-known and documented. It comprises a range of literature that focuses on the potential of ceasefires to alter military campaigns, such as allowing warring parties the time and space to rearm, manoeuvre troops, or resupply (Hampson and Aall 2004, 158; Mahieu 2007, 224–225). Another rich vein homes in on possible ways civil wars can be terminated. For example, American political scientist Monica Duffy Toft (2010, 29) argues that a rebel military victory may actually decrease civil war recidivism. Likewise, Howard and Stark (2017/2018) discuss how the *Zeitgeist* can affect the military and diplomatic strategies actors prioritise in civil wars and whether the norms of the time make it easier to potentially negotiate a ceasefire. This literature has a lot to offer—military dynamics and how violence is used are crucial to civil war outcomes. However, a commonality of a majority of the current scholarship is its focus on ceasefires as tools to develop a negative peace i.e. the absence of direct, physical violence (Galtung 2011) or as Grotius (2012 ed, 451) put it, 'whatever is done by force against the enemy'. Accordingly, ceasefires, in practice and in scholarship, remain primarily defined and conceptualised as a way to stop or reduce the overt use of violence and as a preliminary and provisional step in a teleology from war to peace.

This article proposes using the literature on complex political order to broaden existing understandings of ceasefires by considering that the space of wartime order ceasefires create affects other contested areas beyond only violence. Authors in this field argue that civil wars are more than 'all terror all the time' and that despite, and perhaps because of the violence, types of order can and do emerge (Lubkemann 2008, 249). This wartime order then offers both threats and opportunities to different local actors (Boege et al. 2008). Seen from this vantage point, ceasefires potentially have the ability to interject into more localised disputes for the creation and control of rebel governance (Harrison and Kyed 2019) and economic networks (Woods 2011), influence demands for recognition and legitimation (Kolås 2011) and assist in the consolidation of control over citizenship and property rights (Sosnowski 2019).

The issue of what order is and how it functions has already generated considerable academic attention and debate. These range from the interaction of official and more non-official forms of legal orders (von Benda-Beckmann 2002); the social construction of order through various types of governance (e.g. Raeymaekers, Menkhaus, and Vlassenroot 2008); to debates regarding the nature of violence and order in civil war (Kalyvas, Shapiro, and Masoud 2008), described alternatively as 'wartime political order' (Staniland 2012), 'wartime social order' (Arjona 2014) or 'armed order' (Staniland 2017). In short, the concept of order, what it is, where it comes from and how it is maintained, remains

relatively amorphous but scholars from Durkheim to Foucault certainly saw it as crucial and determinative. Order, and the predictability it brings, does not simply exist: it becomes, emerges, settles and disappears. Even during times of immense societal upheaval such as civil war people continue to create their own sense of regularity and predictability. This wartime order is not found in the absence of violence but rather as a direct response of individuals and groups to it (von Benda-Beckmann and Pirie 2007, 6). Consequently, the concept of order provides a useful analytical lens through which to comprehend a range of contested dynamics and relationships during wartime. This relates particularly to how people, institutions, and society organise their affairs during times when violence has (notionally) paused, such as during a ceasefire.

Within these debates, the scholarship on complex political order highlights that order is created through an ongoing process of negotiation and (re)interpretation between the state and other societal actors (Hagmann and Peclard 2010; Lund 2006). In contrast to much of the conflict resolution literature that views states at war as ‘weak’ (Karl 1997, 42) or ‘failed’ (Helman and Ratner 1992/1993/1993) and in need of being helped transition between violence and peace (often through the negotiation of ceasefires), Volker Boege et al. (2008, 23) suggest that states at war are not in Hobbesian anarchy but rather replete with a range of political orders. They argue that, ‘diverse and competing authority structures, sets of rules, logics of order, and claims to power co-exist, overlap, and intertwine’. This ‘hybrid political order’, as they call it, includes not just formal state institutions but traditional societal structures (families, clans, tribes, village communities), customary legal providers (religious or parochial) and more local forms of authority (village elders, clan chiefs, healers, religious leaders). In recent years, the concept of complex political order and the reality of hybridity has moved both academic and applied discourses away from notions of state failure and collapse towards conceptualisations of plurality in and of governance (Stepputat 2018). These more locally-focused notions about how people order their lives embrace the ‘intimate and messy’ relations between different governance actors (Hoffmann and Kirk 2013, 21). Therefore, during times of war the vertical, horizontal and networked relationships of authority between local actors and what we call the state do not stop. Instead, they continue unabated. While these relationships and systems can change as a result of violence, they also change during periods of relative calm. In both these spaces, particular types of wartime order are created that give shape and meaning to people’s lives.

Therefore, if we view order as being in a constant process of transformation, as these authors suggest, then violence is only one possible area that can be impacted by a ceasefire agreement. Consequently, it is analytically and practically much more beneficial to define ceasefires beyond only their ability to affect violence. A broader definition of ceasefires agreements is: *the codification of a certain military and political state of affairs during wartime*. The fact of a ceasefire’s negotiation and codification has the ability to activate rivalries, machinations for control over certain important resources (such as economic networks or governance institutions) and create opportunities for a range of state and non-state actors. This is the wartime order ceasefires create.

## Methodology

This definition, together with the matrix of four different types of ceasefires presented in the following section, enables more free-ranging hypotheses about how types of wartime

order may relate to disputed areas of authority and avenues for political power consolidation. The typology moves away from simple categorisations or only providing a new vocabulary to describe ceasefires, but to something more novel and challenging. That is, theorising that these types of ceasefires can have different effects on a range of salient dynamics beyond violence during armed conflict.

In order to re-conceptualise ceasefires as different types of wartime order, the typology couples the above literature with an analysis of ceasefire agreements from the United Nations Peacemaker/Language of Peace database. This is because, at the time of original analysis, there were no publicly available datasets devoted purely to ceasefires.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, I use only agreements categorised in this dataset coded as a 'Ceasefire/Cessation of Hostilities'. I have also restricted the exercise to ceasefire agreements taking place within intra-state conflicts that occurred after the end of the Cold War.<sup>6</sup> These parameters garnered an initial 280 documents. I then discarded documents that contained terms for a more permanent political solution (e.g. constitutional or parliamentary arrangements) because these documents are more akin to a final peace agreement in form but also happen to contain a ceasefire clause. This brought the total number of documents analysed to 186.

George and Bennett (2005, 165) posit that

the hallmark of a fruitful and cumulative typological theory is the refinement of contingent generalizations that differentiate both independent and dependent variables in ways that produce increasingly close similarity of cases within each type, as well as sharper distinctions between types.

I therefore use abductive reasoning to generate the two variables of the typology—the textual precision of the documents and the power relationship between the parties. To begin, I read the 186 ceasefire agreements in the dataset noting certain similarities, differences and themes. I then looked to the existing literature for theories regarding what are considered important factors in ceasefire negotiations and adjusted the dimensions of the typology based on this. I then attempted to place ceasefires from the dataset into the matrix in a logical way. Finally, I used a number of more local ceasefire agreements that were not in the original dataset to further test the types. This ensured that each cell of the typology is relatively parsimonious.

As primary documents, ceasefires are 'a topic rather than a resource' (Prior 2004, 91). As such, the nature of the text has meaning and value in and of itself and this enables us to draw (tentative) causal lines between ceasefires and their political ramifications. This is particularly relevant in understanding ceasefire documents as *codified* order. Secondly, a number of authors have already discussed the implications of power-relations in regards to peace agreements (Talentino 2007; Werner and Yuen 2005). In this article, I expand their argument to hypothesise that the greater the power disparity between ceasefire signatories the more likely it is that territorial control will be more fragmented (i.e. not an easily discernable military front-line) and that the more powerful party will try to negotiate terms that they see as beneficial to their own ends. This occurs through the use of detailed wording of certain terms that prevent signatories from modifying their military positions (at least in the short-term e.g. Sri Lanka<sup>7</sup>) or through vague wording that would allow for broad interpretation based on the needs of the actor with the most power (e.g. the 2016 Cessation of Hostilities in Syria<sup>8</sup>).

A limitation of the methodology is that an analysis of ceasefire documentation using this dataset (and potentially others) can take one only so far. While relatively comprehensive as relating to peace agreements, most databases only include written, ‘officially’ documented ceasefires while in practice there are many ceasefire agreements that are anything but official and in writing or just simply not official enough to be included in these particular databases. To counteract this, I also tested the typology with more ‘unofficial’ ceasefires (e.g. more local agreements) from the PA-X dataset.<sup>9</sup> Another issue is that testing the typology more fully requires sustained, empirical research on ceasefires from a variety of civil wars. While I draw on my previous work from Syria here, additional fieldwork will need to be undertaken to see if the typology holds true for other conflict environments. This is an additional and worthwhile task for future research.

**Towards a typology of ceasefires**

Table 1.

**Substantive ceasefires**

Substantive ceasefires have a high level of textual detail and precision of terms that relate to the security arrangements for the ceasefire, such as reference to particular geographical points for troop withdrawal (e.g. roads, rivers, bridges), precise distances for the demarcation of troop disengagement and/or exact reference to quantity and type of detainee releases and from which facilities. Sections of substantive ceasefires may also relate to weapons management and/or procedures for disarmament such as amnesty zones or troop assembly arrangements. Substantive ceasefires also commonly contain a map or at the least written specifics relating to the territorial delineations of these security arrangements. The power-relations between parties to substantive ceasefires are more symmetrical. In practice, this means that they are able to maintain a military front-line and there is some territorial delineation between adversaries.

Substantive ceasefires make for stable (relatively speaking) outcomes militarily. This is because actors with power symmetry would potentially suffer greater consequences were they to re-interpret or change the terms of substantive agreements and therefore the agreements act as a foundation for subsequent peace talks or to maintain the status quo for a relatively long time period (e.g. Mali<sup>10</sup>). Signatories with symmetrical power relations may have (at least for the time being) accepted the status quo and have little appetite for further military expenditure. As such, they have invested time and effort to negotiate ceasefire terms that are detailed and that they are willing to be bound by and hold the other party to. This stability then has consequences for other political actors and areas

**Table 1.** A typology of ceasefires as wartime order.

Power disparity	Ceasefire text	
	Detailed	Vague
<i>Symmetrical</i>	Substantive Key feature: Specific security arrangements	Interim Key feature: Monitoring mechanism
<i>Asymmetrical</i>	Coercive Key feature: Surrender agreement	Symbolic Key feature: Aspirational



beyond the military arena too. For example, actors can consolidate their control over governance mechanisms and populations or non-state armed groups are able to invest more time into diplomatic endeavours to secure legitimacy and/or funding from international actors (see, e.g. Sørnbø et al. 2011 regarding Sri Lanka).

### **Interim ceasefires**

The terms of interim ceasefires are vaguely worded when compared to substantive ceasefires but they always include reference to the establishment of some sort of monitoring mechanism that can go by a variety of names including Joint Commission,<sup>11</sup> Special Observation Commission,<sup>12</sup> Joint Monitoring Group,<sup>13</sup> and supervision mechanism.<sup>14</sup> However, there remains limited detail about how this mechanism or body (established to act as an independent and neutral third party arbiter) will function on the ground. Interim ceasefires occur when power relations are more equal although generally do not last as long as substantive ceasefires. This is because the vague text of interim ceasefires provides an optical win to signatories and are used to preserve the status quo in the short-medium term.

Signatories consider interim ceasefires as a type of placeholder that best serve their political and military needs at a specific juncture in the conflict. Likewise, because they usually establish some sort of mechanism for setting another process in train, interim ceasefires are often used *ad infinitum* to abstain from dealing with key conflict issues. Interim ceasefires then allow belligerents to retain the status quo at the diplomatic level while making their own plans for local arenas. As the monitoring framework is often implemented by a third-party, coming to an agreement about the monitoring mechanism may also give the parties someone else to politically scapegoat for their own shortcomings in failing to abide by the terms of the ceasefire agreement.

### **Symbolic ceasefires**

Symbolic ceasefires contain texts that are more aspirational in nature. As such, the provisions are more like a statement of intent or memorandum of understanding, attesting to what the parties would ideally like to see happen but with no detail on how this will actually be achieved or indeed expectations that the provisions will even be implemented. Symbolic ceasefires occur where power-relations are asymmetrical and one party is in position to either dictate, enforce and/or ignore the terms of the agreement. Symbolic ceasefires may give the more powerful party, usually the state but in some cases the rebel group, the chance to ignore them and continue their own campaigns to consolidate power and authority under the cover of the ceasefire (e.g. the Pakistani Taliban in Swat).<sup>15</sup>

### **Coercive ceasefires**

Coercive ceasefires are not a negotiated solution but more akin to a codified surrender. As such, belligerents may consider these the ideal type of ceasefire—either in the form of a unilateral ceasefire declaration (for example the Basque separatist movement ETA<sup>16</sup>); a type of coercive ‘strangle contract’ (Sosnowski 2019); or, where a rebel group is folded into the security apparatus of the state (e.g. Guatemala<sup>17</sup>). This is because they provide



very stable military outcomes. It makes sense for coercive ceasefires to occur at times when power-relations between the armed actors are extremely asymmetric. This is because the actor in the position of power coerces the weaker party into signing or making the ceasefire agreement (or the weaker party may have little other choice) which may end the conflict at a military level and create stability but have manifold political and ethical ramifications associated with a victor's peace. These include issues relating to access to justice and reconciliation, human rights abuses or property and citizenship rights.

The concept of coercive ceasefires pushes the notion of what we can define as a ceasefire into broader territory. While coercive ceasefires are likely to make the most stable outcomes and resonate well with the statebuilding agendas of the dominant party, they are evidently riddled with all the moral hazards associated with a one-sided peace, such as coercion and human rights abuses. Thinking about these types of 'agreements' as coercive ceasefires rather than simply military victories allows us to better interrogate statebuilding agendas in the post-conflict environment (cf. Lewis, Heathershaw, and Megoran 2018).

### Case study: ceasefires and the Syrian civil war

While not comprehensive, the below table features some of the major ceasefires used throughout the Syrian civil war. The text and power relations of the signatories allows for each ceasefire to be placed within the typology. The typology then shows how different types of ceasefires are used as military and political tools by signatories as well as other actors on the ground to reinforce control over key assets and resources. Using ceasefires that occurred throughout the chronology of the conflict also illustrates how the various types can be used with effect, and have ramifications for, subsequent dynamics and negotiations (Table 2).

#### *Kofi Annan's 6-point peace plan*

After the Syrian state deployed its military to quell popular protests in the south of the country in March 2011, the UN and the Arab League emerged as principal players in early initiatives to address the escalating crisis in Syria. In March 2012, Syria's president Bashar al-Assad agreed to the terms of a six-point peace plan negotiated by the UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan.<sup>18</sup> This is despite, in an interview a few months earlier, declaring that he did not think the United Nations was credible saying that engagement with the body is 'a game we play'.<sup>19</sup>

**Table 2.** Major ceasefires in the Syrian civil war.

Year	Ceasefire	Ceasefire type	Where	Main parties to agreement
2012	Kofi Annan's 6-point peace plan	Interim	Whole country	UN, Arab League, Syria
February 2016	Cessation of Hostilities (Geneva peace process)	Symbolic	Whole country	US, Russia
August 2016 - ongoing	Reconciliation agreements	Coercive	First in Daraya	Syria, Russia, local authorities
May 2017 - ongoing	De-escalation zones (Astana-Sochi peace process)	Substantive	Four demarcated territorial zones	Russia, Turkey, Iran

Kofi Annan's peace plan can be classified as an interim ceasefire as it is vaguely worded and establishes a supervision mechanism to monitor the plan's implementation. In these relatively early stages of the conflict, the power disparity between the Syrian state and the opposition movement was more symmetrical—the Assad regime perceived itself to be in an existential fight (al-Haj Saleh 2017). The supervision mechanism contained in the ceasefire was quickly overshadowed by broader strategic tensions between members of the Security Council's P5, notably the USA, Russia and China (MacFarquhar 2011). These related predominantly to Security Council Resolution 1973 that authorised the NATO-led intervention in Libya by explicitly calling for the establishment of a no-fly zone and enabling Member States to 'take all necessary measures ... to protect civilians and civilian populated areas'.<sup>20</sup> This resolution was conceived of by Russia and China as giving the UN too broad a mandate for external intervention and negating the principle of sovereignty (Abboud 2018, 145). Both Russia and China clearly did not want a repeat of the events in Libya in Syria (or within their own borders). As such, the terms of Annan's six-point plan were similarly vague in scope to the Arab League's initial ceasefire proposals and were also deliberately kept unactionable. One term of the plan asks the parties to 'cease violence in all its forms' but gives no obligations, responsibilities, coordination or notification procedures that could help the parties achieve this.

At best, Annan's interim ceasefire succeeded in creating both a short-lived optical win for the players and at worst, through the illusion of an ongoing peace process, overshadowed the escalation of violence by the parties on the ground, particularly the Syrian state (Human Rights Watch 2012), as well as the emergence of other sites of power beyond the regime. These ranged from pro-regime militia leaders, a quickly diversifying armed opposition as well as more localised forms of public authority such as tribal leaders, and local administrative committees. Lacking a robust mandate, passive rules of engagement and statements that did not translate well to field realities, the 300-member UN supervision mission lasted less than two months in-country (Gowan and Dreisbach 2015, 845). Through its masterful use of official obstructionism and targeted violence, the Syrian state managed to frustrate the mission's mandate and confine the monitors to a hotel in Damascus (UN News Center ).

### ***February 2016 cessation of hostilities***

In February 2016 Russia and the USA negotiated a bilateral cessation of hostilities that aimed to suspend violence across Syria beginning at midnight on 27 February 2016. The terms of this symbolic ceasefire were vaguely worded. While the power disparity between the ceasefire's signatories (the USA and Russia) was more even, it was asymmetrical for the parties they represented on the ground (i.e. the Syrian state and the opposition). The vague wording enabled the Syrian state to effectively target the opposition wherever it wanted under the pretext that 'terrorist' elements were in the area. Despite cursory reference to the USA and Russia acting as guarantors for the agreement, any meaningful monitoring or sanctioning of violations of the terms of the ceasefire remained illusory.<sup>21</sup>

The lack of clarity allowed for the terms to be defined by the dominant conflict parties, at this time largely the Syrian state and its sponsor Russia, in ways that best suited their military and political goals. While the ceasefire offered some diplomatic kudos to

Russia and the USA it remained a highly performative and somewhat aspirational document. While the ceasefire did succeed in reducing violence for a time at the national level, it enabled more localised military and political strategies. In creating a short-term break in overall violence, the February 2016 cessation of hostilities played a role in recalibrating the dispersion of power between local governance actors and economic networks. This was particularly true in terms of control over governance institutions and economic networks linked to smuggling and humanitarian aid, as powerful actors at the local level jockeyed for position (Sosnowski 2018). Beginning in August 2016, this symbolic ceasefire also helped the Syrian state better prepare for and enforce coercive ceasefires, or what it called ‘reconciliation agreements’.

### ***Reconciliation agreements***

Since the first coercive ceasefire in Daraya in August 2016, hundreds of reconciliation agreements have supposedly been ‘negotiated’ across Syria. Augmented by Russian man and airpower since September 2015, and impacted by the dynamics of the February 2016 symbolic ceasefire, the Syrian regime had more military ability to lay siege to rebel-held communities. Sieges laid the groundwork for these coercive ceasefires.<sup>22</sup> Euphemistically known as reconciliation agreements, these agreements were not attempts at reconciliation in the sense of ‘making good again’ but more akin to ‘strangle contracts’ (Sosnowski 2019).

The majority of reconciliation agreements have a similar structure and include two important and specifically worded terms. The first enables the Syrian state to resume control over the property of the area and the second details how citizens will be able to ‘resolve their situation’.<sup>23</sup> Theoretically, this latter term offers people a choice about whether to stay or leave their community post-reconciliation. However, in practice, anyone that has been active in the rebellion actually has little choice other than to leave if they want to survive once the regime retakes control of the area.<sup>24</sup> This extends to the opposition political leadership, humanitarian and civil society actors, members of armed groups or Syrians who have dodged their military conscription.

Likewise, the use of siege and starve tactics prior to a coercive ceasefire means that power relations are highly asymmetrical. In this ingenious and quasi-legalistic way, the terms of these coercive ceasefires offer the Syrian state the ability to reassert its authority over property in rebel-held territory and forcibly triage the population into those able to re-join the state from those exiled from it.

### ***De-escalation zones***

Russia’s military intervention in Syria in September 2015 marked a meaningful juncture in the overall direction the civil war appeared to be headed. Re-enforced by Russian man and airpower, battlefield dynamics once again began to favour the Syrian state. One of the most influential outcomes of the Russian-led political process has been a substantive ceasefire in May 2017 under the auspices of the Astana-Sochi peace process that created four territorially delineated ‘de-escalation zones’.<sup>25</sup> One zone was in the south-west around Dara’a and Quinetra; one in Eastern Ghouta; one in Northern Homs; and, one in Idlib.

In-line with traditional understandings of ceasefires, the de-escalation zones were successful in decreasing violence in the four zones initially. This consequently freed up Syrian and Russian man and airpower to focus on re-taking areas in the east of the country still held by Islamic State. However, this military aspect is just one element of the ceasefire calculus. Once military operations against IS were completed, Syria and Russia were in a better strategic position to dictate the terms of what they see as a political solution to the conflict on communities in the de-escalation areas through more geographically targeted coercive ceasefires aka reconciliation agreements.<sup>26</sup> This is because the primary aim of coercive ceasefires has been to offer a type of political solution to the conflict, however, heavy-handed and one-sided it may be.

The reconciliation process for three of the four de-escalation zones was completed between March and July 2018 and now only the Idlib zone still remains. The Eastern Ghouta zone was the first to surrender to the Syrian government in March 2018. The Syrian regime's siege and bombardment of Ghouta, alleged use of chemical weapons coupled with the lack-lustre international response effectively signalled to opposition authorities in the other de-escalation zones areas that no external help would be forthcoming.<sup>27</sup> Given this reality, the southern de-escalation zone and the smaller zone in Northern Homs were quick to accept coercive ceasefires with Russia and the Syrian state, requiring relatively little military expenditure.

However, the substantive de-escalation zone ceasefire also influenced the Syrian government's ability to influence diplomatic and security arrangements for its territory (Sosnowski 2020). This is because it was neither a signatory nor directly involved in negotiating the de-escalation zones. Instead, Russia, Turkey and Iran made the agreement on behalf of the Syrian state. Through terms of the ceasefire relating to the establishment and functioning of checkpoints and observation posts on the perimeter of the de-escalation zones, Russia has also augmented the presence of its Military Police on the ground, allowing it a more granular level of control over local-level dynamics.<sup>28</sup>

Broader level security control in Syria also now depends in some part on the commitment of the substantive ceasefire's international signatories.<sup>29</sup> For example, Russia underwrites the Fifth Corps—an amalgam of local paramilitary groups, while the National Defense Forces come under Iranian leadership (Alami 2018). Both of these were established as a result of the substantive and coercive ceasefires. Because the Syrian government does not currently have the ability to reassert its own exclusive control over all the territory of the de-escalation areas or the material and financial resources needed to keep these local level militia commanders in check, it recognises that a way to prevent further large scale insurrection is to turn a blind-eye to criminality and graft gleaned from local populations, particularly in the newly acquired de-escalation zones (Heydemann 2018).

## 6. Conclusion

The typology of ceasefires developed in this article and the case study from the Syrian civil war shows that the time during a ceasefire, when violence (notionally) subsides, should be understood as being deeply intertwined with both preceding and subsequent conflict dynamics. Even before a war has supposedly ended, pauses in violence such as ceasefires provide an excellent vantage point from which to survey the machinations for authority by different international and local actors. Focusing more on determining the tensions

embedded in these processes of making and unmaking political systems, rather than only on military dynamics, should better enable us to see the potential of ceasefires for influencing these systems of wartime order.

Malin Åkebo (2013, 12) argues that, 'the nature of [ceasefire] agreements [is] intended to change the forms of interaction between parties to violent conflict [and therefore] becomes fundamentally important to examine and analyse'. The typology presented in this article goes beyond traditional understandings about ceasefires and terminations in violence and helps in this endeavour by showing that actors in civil wars can potentially enter into different types of ceasefires and these have diverse implications both in practice and analytically for military and political affairs, as well as subsequent negotiations. These relate to recognition and legitimization of non-state actors, rebel governance efforts, access to economic resources and networks and rights to citizenship and property.

Critics may argue that typologies can have a simplifying effect on what are inherently messy 'real world' situations however, typologies also enable 'a rich and differentiated depiction of a phenomenon and can generate discriminating and contingent explanations and policy recommendations' (George and Bennett 2005). The typology of ceasefires posited here has the ability to broaden our currently very limited understanding of the effects ceasefires can have in practice. It does this through uncovering that ceasefire agreements are not monolithic. The four types of ceasefires are not obscure outliers but have rather been hiding in plain sight in the terms of ceasefire agreements reached during civil wars. While there are some grey areas between the groupings, each cell exhibits its own set of characteristics and therefore, potentially has certain discernible ramifications that can be put to work theoretically and practically. For example, substantive ceasefires can provide relatively stable outcomes for the short term but enable actors to develop control over important political arenas such as diplomacy and security; interim ceasefires are a stalling mechanism often used by parties for the optical win they create and to cover political machinations between ceasefire signatories or other local actors; symbolic ceasefires allow for the establishment of governance institutions and consolidation of control over economic networks. They can also be used as a precursor to coercive ceasefires; which are imposed on the weaker party and therefore offer the stronger actor *carte blanche* to assert rights to property and citizenship; commit other human rights abuses and/or horde political power.

Such a broader ranging discussion of ceasefires as not simply the opposite of violence means that the meaning of what constitutes the success or failure of a ceasefire changes. Additionally, the typology allows conflict resolution practitioners and ceasefire negotiators to think about and operationalise how different ceasefires may affect their negotiating practices and how the ideal or strategic outcome for actors may be much broader than simply halting armed conflict. Likewise, in considering that conflict actors may be hoping for benefits in other areas beyond the military one by entering different ceasefires, third parties involved in ceasefire monitoring, peacekeeping missions or peacebuilding activities can ask different questions and more carefully think through precisely what is up for grabs or at stake, as well as the implications of this for their own functioning and deployments.

The focus of this article has been on mapping out the variance in ceasefire agreements and theorising the effects of this variation on other areas of contested control beyond the military arena. Through applying the typology to the Syrian civil war, the implications of

the exercise in concept formation challenge traditional definitions and assumptions about ceasefires and order in civil war more broadly. Those conventional definitions overwhelmingly focus on the ability of ceasefires to stop or end violence and pave the way towards some sort of more lasting peace settlement. This article has presented a view that the wartime order created by ceasefires is different and that four types of ceasefires have diverse military and political ramifications on the ground. From the perspective of much of the conflict resolution literature, a calculated decision is always made by conflict parties about whether to enter into a particular type of ceasefire (see, e.g. Grieg and Diehl 2012; Zartman 2015). However, I argue that while a ceasefire agreement may (or may not) suspend violence for a certain length of time the mere fact of its negotiation and codification means that it can have ramifications for a range of actors that are attempting to maximise their benefits in contested military and political arenas. As such, this article urges broader thinking about the types of contestations, beyond only the military arena, that ceasefires can influence. In practice, as the Chinese proverb suggests, the signing of the contract is only the beginning of the negotiation.

## Notes

1. I put peace in inverted commas here to denote that the nature of peace is a disputed concept in the literature and can have varying meanings in different contexts. Understandings range from Roland Paris' conception of the 'liberal peace' to Johan Galtung's 'positive and negative peace', but see also Bart Klem's discussion of peace as an unachievable utopian ideal in 'The problem of peace and the meaning of "post-war"', *Conflict, Security and Development*, May (2018) or David Keen 'War and peace: What's the difference?', *International Peacekeeping*, 7.4 (2000), 1-22.
2. In September 2019, PRIO and ETH Zurich released a dataset solely devoted to ceasefires – the first of its kind. Due to academic timeframes, when I began to write this article the only relevant dataset on ceasefires was provided by the UN's Peacemaker and Languages of Peace dataset. The data used to make the typology was therefore scraped from these in October 2017 and placed into a workable format in order to be coded. The databases are linked to each other and available at: <http://peacemaker.un.org/document-search> and <https://www.languageofpeace.org/#/>. From this dataset, I use only ceasefire agreements that lacked a proposed political solution (that thereby made them more akin to peace agreements). Ideally, one could apply the typology to the newer PRIO or PA-X datasets but this is a time consuming exercise as it requires reading the text of many hundreds of agreements. Likewise, the existence of these new datasets does not negate the use of the ceasefire documents from the UN/Language of Peace dataset.
3. Joint Statement of the United States and the Russian Federation, as Co-Chairs of the ISSG, on Cessation of Hostilities in Syria, 22 February 2016. Available at: <https://sy.usembassy.gov/joint-statement-united-states-russian-federation-co-chairs-issg-cessation-hostilities-syria-february-22-2016/>; Cessation of Hostilities Framework Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement, 9 December 2002.
4. Memorandum on the Creation of De-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic 4 May 2017. Available at: [https://www.peaceagreements.org/search?SearchForm%5Bregion%5D=&SearchForm%5Bcountry\\_entity%5D=&SearchForm%5Bname%5D=de-escalation&SearchForm%5Bcategory\\_mode%5D=any&SearchForm%5Bagreement\\_text%5D=&s=Search+Database](https://www.peaceagreements.org/search?SearchForm%5Bregion%5D=&SearchForm%5Bcountry_entity%5D=&SearchForm%5Bname%5D=de-escalation&SearchForm%5Bcategory_mode%5D=any&SearchForm%5Bagreement_text%5D=&s=Search+Database)
5. See note 2.
6. I use the date 1 January 1990.
7. Agreement on a Ceasefire between the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam 2002. Available at: <http://>



- [peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/LK\\_020222\\_CeasefireAgreementGovernment-LiberationTigersTamilEelam.pdf](http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/LK_020222_CeasefireAgreementGovernment-LiberationTigersTamilEelam.pdf).
8. Joint Statement of the United States and the Russian Federation, as co-chairs of the ISSG, on Cessation of Hostilities in Syria, February 22, 2016. Available at: <https://sy.usembassy.gov/joint-statement-united-states-russian-federation-cochairsissg-cessation-hostilities-syria-february-22-2016/>.
  9. <https://www.peaceagreements.org/search>.
  10. Arrangement securitaire pour une cessation des hostilites, 5 June 2015. Available at: <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/Arrangement%20s%C3%A9curitaire%20pour%20une%20cessation%20des%20hostilit%C3%A9s.pdf>.
  11. Agreement on a Temporary Ceasefire and the Cessation of Other Hostile Acts on the Tajik-Afghan Border and within the Country for the Duration of the Talks (Tehran Agreement) 1994. Available at: [http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/TJ\\_940917\\_TehranAgreement.pdf](http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/TJ_940917_TehranAgreement.pdf).
  12. Protocol Of the Meeting of Delegates for the Peaceful Resolution of the Crisis in the Chechen Republic, with the Cooperation of the OSCE 1995. Available at: [http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/RU\\_950621\\_ProtocoloftheMeetingofDelegatePeacefulResolutionofCrisisChechenRepublic.pdf](http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/RU_950621_ProtocoloftheMeetingofDelegatePeacefulResolutionofCrisisChechenRepublic.pdf).
  13. Agreed Ground Rules for Suspension of Operations between the Security Forces and the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) 2000. Available at: [http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IN\\_000529\\_AgreedGroundRules.pdf](http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IN_000529_AgreedGroundRules.pdf).
  14. Preliminary Understanding on the United Nations Supervision Mechanism in the Syrian Arab Republic 2012. Available at: [http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/SY%20UN\\_120419\\_UNSupervisionMechanism.pdf](http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/SY%20UN_120419_UNSupervisionMechanism.pdf).
  15. Swat Peace Accord, 16 February 2009. Available at: [https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/PA\\_090116\\_Swat%20Peace%20Accord.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/PA_090116_Swat%20Peace%20Accord.pdf).
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  20. S/RES/1973 (2011) UN Security Council Resolution. Available at: [https://www.undocs.org/S/RES/1973%20\(2011\)](https://www.undocs.org/S/RES/1973%20(2011)).
  21. Personal interview with embassy official, Amman, Jordan, 1 March 2017.
  22. Skype interview with conflict researcher, Greece, 24 January 2018.
  23. '*Taswiyat al-wad'ahum*' in Arabic literally means 'sorting out affairs/regularising status'.
  24. Personal interview with humanitarian advisor, Beirut, Lebanon, 19 February 2018.
  25. Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic, 4 May 2017. There is some debate as to whether all four zones technically come under the auspices of the Astana peace process. This was seen most prominently in the US-backed zone in the south.
  26. Skype interview with conflict analyst, Moscow, Russia, 4 December 2018.
  27. WhatsApp audio interview with conflict analyst, Beirut, Lebanon, 13 December 2018.
  28. Skype interview with conflict analyst, Tbilisi, Georgia, 7 November 2018.
  29. Skype interview with conflict researcher, France, 25 October 2018.



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## Notes on contributor

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